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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Iraq, Syria/US, Lebanon, Palestinian Territories (11/21)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers led with reports on Iraq, featuring a statement by the Commander of US airborne troops in the Central Command in Iraq that the US does not possess any evidence against Syria on the issue of infiltrations through the Syrian border, and a statement by President Bush ruling out withdraw of US troops from Iraq during his term in office.

Papers continued to report on demonstrations and sit-ins in Damascus denouncing US pressure and threats against Syria. Government-owned Al-Thawra headlined statements by Russian circles saying that "false accusations against Syria reflect a continuing US policy of hegemony"

On Lebanon, papers cited a statement by Nabih Berri, Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, denying that Lebanon will be a passageway for targeting Syria, and a statement by Adnan Arkaji, a former Lebanese MP, who called for interrogating the government about the presence of Mossad elements in Lebanon, as reported by US Financial Times.

End of summary.

¶2. Selected Headlines:

"Killing and injury of five British soldiers in Basra. Bush: I will not withdraw US forces as long as I'm the president" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 11/21)

"Commander of US airborne troops in the Central Command in Iraq: We do not possess any evidence against Syria on the issue of infiltrations through the Syrian border" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 11/21)

"A Huge popular sit-in in Al-Rawda square in Damascus denouncing US pressure and threats to Syria. Arab students demonstrate in Damascus calling on Annan to take the side of righteousness" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/21)

"Berri denies that Lebanon is a passageway for targeting Syria. Adnan Arkaji [former Lebanese MP] calls for interrogating the government about the presence of Mossad elements in Lebanon" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/21)

"A letter of solidarity with Syria from the Yemeni parliament. Arab intellectuals and authors denounce the anti-Syria campaign. Russian circles: False accusations against Syria reflect continuing US policy of hegemony" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/21)

"The expanded Iraqi national reconciliation conference will be held at the end of February in Baghdad. Withdrawal of foreign troops is linked to rebuilding of the Iraqi army" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 11/21)

"Occupation forces attack Jenin. Ministers of the Israeli Labor Party resign today. A plan to seize arms in Palestinian territories is in effect. The Palestinian Authority denies postponement of elections. An urgent European mission to run the Rafah border crossing" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 11/21)

¶3. Editorial Block Quotes:

"A Storm in Washington"

Ali Nasrallah, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (11/21): "Some might think that the storm caused by Representative John Murtha in the Congress has ended with a vote against the draft resolution calling for immediate withdrawal from Iraq. But an observer who follows closely the current dispute between Democrats and Republicans in Washington will find that there is a fire still ablaze under the ashes, indicating that a more dangerous storm is approaching."

"Representative Murtha warned that Iraq will not be free without an end to the US occupation and that the so-called

political victory in Iraq cannot be achieved because the US presence has become the incentive for violence.

"President Bush rejected the idea of withdrawal, accusing Democrats of surrender and confirming that he will proceed with his policy of fighting so-called terrorism. The Democrats' vision that this strategy will lead to inevitable failure is more realistic because it reflects the opinion of the majority in the US, according to the latest opinion polls.

"The current disputes within the US Congress reflect the reality of the US impasse which the Bush Administration is suffering from because of its aggressive war and rejected occupation and due to its erroneous policies that jeopardize world peace and stability, heralding what is more grave on the domestic and the international levels....

"If President Bush does not find this issue catastrophic, then the catastrophe which he is talking about would be the beginning of the collapse of his second term in office and the failure of the aggressive scheme of his administration in the region. This will open the door for questioning and accountability by the American people and their constitutional courts under the charge of damaging US interests....

"The US storm, caused by Representative Murtha, is apt to become a destructive hurricane for the US Administration, that has not learned the lessons of the experiences of Afghanistan and Iraq and that is trying to create new hotbeds of tension in the region serving the interests of Israel and its expansionist schemes, and protecting its security, stability and hegemony at the expense of the American people's interests, security and stability."

"Marketing Illusions to Create Justifications"

Mohieddin Al-Mohamed, an op-ed writer in government-owned Tishreen, commented (11/21): "Despite the attempt of the US media to portray Bush as a hero fighting terrorism, this characterization has started to be laid bare to Americans and world public opinion after the invasion of Iraq and exposure of the false claims on Iraqi WMD. The NY Times described the Bush Administration as catastrophic.... A recent opinion poll showed that 63% of Americans do not approve President Bush's policies in Iraq and that Bush's polarity has declined to 34%. This means that the teams of deception in the Pentagon, which were created to market US Administration policies in Iraq and the world, have failed to mislead a huge percentage of Americans....

"The misleading by US media and Arab-speaking media which aim to distort the image of peace-loving Syria, which rejects terrorism and hegemony and cooperates with international legitimacy, will not deceive all the people all the time. The popular and official moves by neighboring and peace-loving countries to express solidarity with Syria and to reject US pressure confirm that pretexts pertaining to the assassination of PM Al-Hariri and infiltration of terrorists through Syrian borders, etc, are merely illusions marketed by suspicious media, similar to the illusion of the Iraqi WMD that were not found in Iraq."

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